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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses shortfalls in teacher preparation and the programs that launch prospective teachers toward careers in education. It examines the state's role in connecting that preparation to a career that fulfills the purposes of public education. In too many cases, institutions of higher education have given responsibility for preparing teachers less than their full attention. It is important to get education back on track. State policymakers have primary responsibility for the repair. The state must clearly identify the public and private ends to be used as the basis for judging school and teacher quality. The broader goals of public education need articulation by the state. Quality must be observed in the teacher's ability to utilize what is known about how children learn and why. Too few states have meaningful, ongoing collaboration among K-12 schools and higher education. The state legislature must structure the necessary interaction between the two entities. A promising shift has occurred in states' movement to require more performance-based teacher preparation programs. The paper presents 10 critical quality components of an institution's teacher education program. It concludes by recognizing progress that has occurred and re-emphasizing the role of states in this process. (SM)

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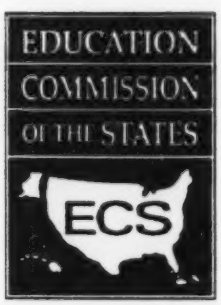

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Institutional Quality and Teacher Preparation: Beyond Testing and Accreditation

Introduction

In Georgia, a physical education teacher assigned to teach English incorrectly spells "strenuous" during his English class. In Oakland, California, a teacher candidate waits two years to hear about her application to work in a district with a 20% annual turnover of teachers. In Texas, one of the country's largest preparation programs has students role-playing on campus rather than experiencing real-life situations in K-12 schools. *Teacher Shortage: False Alarm*, a video by Learning Matters President John Merrow, graphically portrays three serious components of teacher quality in America: teachers assigned to teach out-of-field, bureaucratic hiring and support systems for new teachers, and inadequate preparation.

Any state should attack these breakdowns in quality. But are they doing it? This paper looks at the shortfalls of teacher preparation and the programs that launch a prospective teacher toward a career in education. It examines the state's role in connecting that preparation to a career that fulfills the purposes of public education. Thus far, the connection is weak and the efforts flawed.

The Problem

Since the mid-'80s, most states have sought to improve teacher quality by testing the prospective teacher's basic skills and his or her content base. At least one recent analysis[1] suggests the tests have been less than rigorous and need to be much more demanding. While many experts tend to agree, would raising the test bar really yield better teachers? Maybe. Does a five-point increase in the average percentile score of a graduating class of prospective teachers mean higher achievement by K-12 students? Not necessarily.

Accreditation advocates have pushed for states to require all teacher education programs to be nationally accredited. Given the attention to performance and outcomes rather than inputs, one has to be encouraged by this redirection. Would this, however, ensure stronger preparation programs? Again, maybe.

Evaluation by an external group has merit. But when the basic problem is a higher education culture that does not feel the urgency of K-12 improvement, visits by representatives of other institutions may or may not advance the public interests to the degree needed. Likewise, national accreditation doesn't necessarily translate to an increase in student achievement or school effectiveness.

A more promising shift has occurred in states' movement to require more performance-based, teacher preparation programs. In these programs, preparation moves from the campus to the field

[1] Mitchell, Ruth, and Barth, Patte (1999, Spring). "Not Good Enough: A Content Analysis of Teacher Licensing Examinations," Volume 3, Issue 1, The Education Trust.

where prospective teachers and faculty members are more engaged with schools and students. Such field-based programs and K-12/higher education partnerships have the greatest potential for improving the quality of teacher preparation programs. Higher student test scores? Better classroom management skills? Early studies suggest such dividends.

Quality and its assessment must have their roots in enhancing attainment of the goals citizens hold for the schools of this nation. These goals most often are set by state constitutions, legislative directives and/or the actions of locally elected school boards. The biggest flaw in many of the teacher education reform proposals of the last decade has been their failure to recognize the public purposes of education.

In this context, one has to be disappointed with many of the nation's 1,300 higher education institutions that serve as stewards for our schools in the preparation of teachers. In too many cases, these institutions have given this delegated responsibility less than their full attention. One also has to feel some chagrin over the state agency leaders and policymakers who, through neglect, have allowed the train to derail.

Getting on Track

Question: When there has been a derailment, where does one begin to put the train back on the track?
Answer: By first deciding how critical it is for the train to get to its original destination.

Schools were established to provide the citizenry with a level of literacy that ensured survival of the nation as well as advancement of each citizen toward his or her goals. But there was a broader agenda as well. Parents and others in the community saw schools as the vehicle by which students became economically independent, self-sufficient and/or prepared for postsecondary study. Additionally, they looked to schools to reinforce those morals and behaviors that allowed individuals to interact with others, families to prosper and communities to have some sense of common purpose. Schools were the glue binding communities together in such a way "that this government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth." Lincoln's Gettysburg Address speaks to a basic purpose of education that sometimes is forgotten in today's debates.

In schools, teachers and principals must nurture the skills, attitudes and moral conduct that helps America become stable and strong, while simultaneously helping all future citizens develop their talents and abilities. The two purposes, one public and one private, are mutually dependent.

Assuming Americans still believe in these ends for public education, it is important to save the "train" and continue the trip. Evaluating the success of our schools and the quality of the personnel implementing the education programs truly involves "high stakes" -- the survival of our country.

Question: Whose job is it to get the train back on track?
Answer: The caretakers of the system.

State policymakers have primary responsibility for repair -- not the passengers who take the ride, and not the conductor and engineer who are paid to make the trip productive and efficient. It falls to those persons who direct the investment of nearly one-half trillion dollars in K-12 education to correct the problems and affirm the quality of the enterprise. The students, teachers and administrators have a part in the effort, as do those faculty and program providers who prepare the educators. But the task is more than a professional responsibility.

The state, the entity responsible for education, can and should set the direction and stand ready to confirm arrival at the destination. A test score, the ranking of a college program or an accreditation report tells only part of the story. When we talk of teacher quality, we must recognize the totality of the enterprise and the judgments to be made.

Quality: In the Context of Public Education's Purposes

Question: Where does the state begin to define teacher quality?
Answer: The state must clearly identify the public and private ends to be used as the basis for judging school and teacher quality.

While the legislature commonly sets some general ends for education, detailed directions most often are provided by the state board of education and/or the local school district as representatives of the public. For example, states have identified the following objectives in defining student standards.

Students will:

- Have a high level of literacy and basic competencies
- Be prepared for economic independence, self-sufficiency, entry-level job skills or further study in postsecondary settings
- Demonstrate personal characteristics and moral behavior that undergirds personal, family and community relationships, and the functioning of a civilized society
- Be grounded in their citizenship responsibilities critical to maintaining a democratic form of government.

The broader goals of public education need articulation by the state. Increasingly, with the attractiveness of easy measurement, states have found literacy to be a desirable emphasis. As the cornerstone of learning, no one questions literacy as being the foremost goal. It must be center stage for the student as well as the teacher. But when we evaluate a teacher's performance, it is necessary to judge that individual's potential for influencing the other dimensions of education, that is, the moral and civic aspects. Granted, such contributions are not easily evaluated, but to ensure school and educational accountability, it is necessary to judge the individual's work in advancing all of the education goals established by the state and communities.

Often, these broader aspirations are expressed in other ways. Many states give too little attention to school accreditation standards. Indeed, where this approach to monitoring quality is emphasized, states have set expectations for schools that have enormous implications for teachers. In most cases, these expectations are little known in higher education circles and given

scant consideration in teacher preparation programs. Listed below are examples of accreditation standards having implications for teacher preparation programs. Schools will do the following:

- Provide an environment that promotes student learning
- Adopt and/or publicize local and state learning standards and expected student performance levels
- Measure student achievement and demonstrate effectiveness in implementing plans for improving the scores of low-performing students
- Adopt plans for meaningful community, parent and family involvement
- Ensure a safe and civil school and classroom environment
- Prepare students for the world of technology.

If these are expectations for schools, shouldn't quality have some relationship to the teacher's contribution to achieving these ends?

Quality as it Relates to Learning and Child Development

In addition to the public purposes, state-adopted standards and local school district priorities, quality must be found in the teacher's ability to utilize what we know about how children learn and why. These skills may be specified in state goals but more commonly are found in the expectations for any teacher – in any state or school district. Several of the INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium) standards are examples of these expectations. For instance, teachers must be able to do the following:

- Support their students' intellectual, social and personal development
- Encourage students' development of critical-thinking, problem-solving and performance skills
- Foster active inquiry, collaboration and supportive interaction in the classroom.

It is important to judge a prospective teacher on his or her ability to promote such growth in all students. But judgments such as the INTASC standards omit state expectations relative to education's broader purposes and the various school accreditation demands. Our goal must be to bring the preparation program into an alignment involving all three facets. In many cases, states have tried to do this by adopting teacher standards. Assessment of such standards has discouraged adoption, but we must not throw out these expectations. Rather, we must be more creative in determining how program providers will observe and confirm the prospective teacher's skill in nurturing students to these ends.

Achieving Quality: Redirecting the State "Culture"

As noted above, the higher education culture is often hostile to field-based program efforts of schools of education. State agencies provide a similar challenge in other, very subtle ways.

At a fall 1999 meeting involving seven Midwest states, representatives of only two sites could describe much collaboration between the department of education and the commission or department of higher education. Although most teacher education reform proposals promote K-12/higher education partnerships, fewer than 10 states exhibit any meaningful, ongoing collaboration between the two education agencies. This lack of cooperation between and among

state leaders is not lost on institutional and local leadership. When left to the two agency heads and/or governing boards, the situation seldom changes. Therefore, it is incumbent on the state legislature to structure the necessary interaction, clarify the duties and responsibilities of each agency, provide the necessary resources and set a reporting time relative to legislative monitoring of the desired qualitative changes in the system.
Legislators, committed to achieving a high-quality, performance-based system, must evaluate the capacity of the two education agencies to deliver. In many cases, staff members are unprepared to assume the new roles required in such a system. State departments of education traditionally are staffed to review transcripts and process applications for a state license. Program reviews at both levels are focused for the most part on input variables. Monitoring a performance-based approach requires a certain amount of flexibility and facilitation. Staff must see their tasks as constantly seeking to improve the process and practice by which the system becomes self-correcting and creative, as well as accountable.

Some states have a high percentage of their new teachers coming in from outside the state. When state licenses were based on the completion of certain courses, acceptance of transcripts from out-of-state applicants was handled through reciprocal agreements among states. In a performance-based approach, with state testing of basic skills and content knowledge, reciprocity is not achieved as easily. It becomes important for states to invest in collecting data on out-of-state applicants employed by local school districts, as well as those entering the system through alternative routes, to ensure that quality standards are maintained across the system.

Quality obviously is a public concern. Therefore, if an institution is not delivering a quality product, state approval to prepare teachers should be denied. Accountability involves consequences, and, despite a history of almost automatic state approval of institutional programs, states must be prepared to withdraw program approval from a low-performing institution for the sake of the students, schools and society as a whole. Legislators must demand fair but tough reviews of all program providers. Quality must be earned and confirmed.

Indicators of Institutional Quality

Systemic change and quality in teacher preparation are advanced when internal monitoring is combined with external reviews. Traditionally, school of education leaders have worried more about state and accreditation demands than about the expectations set by their own leadership or governing boards. This pattern is being reversed. Within the last year, the major associations for college and university presidents (American Association of Universities, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and the American Council on Education [ACE]) challenged all of their members to take decisive action in respect to improving teacher quality.

For example, ACE's 1999 Task Force Report called for presidents to "mandate a campus-wide review of the quality of their institutions' teacher education programs." What are the critical quality components of an institution's teacher education program? Here are 10:

1. Demonstrated support from institutional leaders: president, provost, academic officers and the governing boards.

2. A reward system that supports and encourages faculty engagement in schools and field-based activities.
3. Recruitment programs to attract committed, knowledgeable, creative and racially diverse candidates.
4. Early career guidance and school/classroom exposure to ensure that interested candidates are screened and advised as to their potential for being an effective teacher.
5. The involvement of arts and science faculty with school of education staff in respect to the complete range of activities involved in a teacher education program. Additionally, all parties must analyze state basic skill and knowledge test data, and recognize K-12 learning standards in the college curriculum for teacher education candidates.
6. Methods courses including theory and field-based practice.
7. K-12/institutional partnerships to connect K-12 education's needs and expectations to institutional programs.
8. A capstone student teaching or internship experience at least one semester long that allows the institution and school district staff to confirm a teacher candidate's ability to raise, over time, the performance and achievement levels of a group of students consistent with state learning standards.
9. Cooperating K-12 teachers and supervising faculty carefully screened and trained for evaluating teacher candidates' performance.
10. Institutional evaluations and monitoring processes throughout the preparation program. Additionally, data are collected on the problems, successes and recommendations of employed graduates. Compiled evaluation data can be shown to have influenced the institution's curricular and operational policies.

Obviously, there are other criteria institutions might choose to include in such a list, but periodic review of these factors would give institutional leaders some sense of the quality of their program.

There Is Hope

Amid the disappointments in the limited manner we have sought to measure teacher quality, we should recognize that the questions and proposals now on the table were not being highlighted 10 years ago. Today, we have models of good practice and examples of strong legislation. In every state, there are institutions seeking to make major changes in their programs and establish partnerships with K-12 schools to ensure a more realistic and challenging preparation. The challenge for the Education Commission of the States and its chairman, Wyoming Governor Jim Geringer, is one of rallying all governors and state legislative leaders to realize the extent of the system overhaul needed.

To make the connection between broad purposes of education and teacher quality, states must move aggressively to address the weaknesses in their state education agencies. Institutions, not just their schools of education, must be held accountable. Given the action-oriented statements of the university presidents, the movement of the accreditation agencies, the openness of K-12 leaders to a more active involvement in educator preparation programs, and the high priority given to this topic by governors and legislators across the country, there is an opportunity to

capture this momentum and move all states to a higher level of teacher quality and program preparation.

In doing so, we must keep focused on our goals for students and schools and connect these aspirations to our investment in preparation programs and teacher quality assessment procedures. While national associations and federal offices can assist, it falls to the states to put the various pieces in place to ensure a more permanent transformation.